



NEWS

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NORTON ANNOUNCES PROPOSAL TO REMOVE EASTERN POPULATION OF GRAY WOLVES FROM ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST

(MINNEAPOLIS, Minn.) -- Three decades after gray wolves were nearly extinct in the lower 48 states, Interior Secretary Gale Norton announced today that the Eastern Population Segment of gray wolves has recovered to the point where it can be proposed for removal from the list of threatened and endangered species.

Wolves in the Eastern Population Segment, located in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, have climbed beyond the population criteria set out in the species' recovery plan, Norton said. The three states have management plans in place to ensure the species' long-term survival.

The two other populations of gray wolves in the lower 48 states – the western population located in the Rocky Mountain states of Idaho, Wyoming and Montana and the southwestern population of Mexican gray wolves – will continue to be listed under the Act.

“Thirty years ago, the future of the gray wolf in the United States outside of Alaska was anything but certain,” Norton said. “Today we celebrate not only the remarkable comeback of the gray wolf, but the partnerships, dedicated efforts and spirit of conservation that have made this success story possible.”

If finalized, the Service's proposal would remove gray wolves in the eastern United States from the threatened species list. States and tribes with wolf populations on their lands would assume control of managing these wolves.

The Eastern DPS extends from the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas to the East Coast. The southern boundary includes Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, and its northern boundary is the Canadian border. The proposal does not affect red wolves in the southeastern U.S., which are also listed by the Endangered Species Act. The requirements of the Act will remain in effect for wolves in the Eastern DPS until the proposal is finalized.

“The effort to save an endangered predator such as the gray wolf carries with it special challenges and obstacles,” said Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. “We chose a path that had recovery as its ultimate goal, but we used the flexibility under the Endangered Species Act to accommodate the needs of people who are most affected by the wolf's comeback. The fact that we are successful

is a testimony to the dedicated efforts of our biologists and all the partners who worked so hard to ensure the gray wolf has a place in our world.”

“The north woods of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan are healthier ecosystems because of the presence of wolves,” said Steve Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “These animals provide a living laboratory to study how a top predator affects plants and animals within the entire ecosystem.”

Occasional gray wolves have been spotted in the Dakotas. There is no sign, however, that a population has become established in the Dakotas. Individual wolves dispersing from packs in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin have turned up in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana and Nebraska, but there is no evidence of reproducing packs in these areas.

Once removed from the endangered and threatened species list, gray wolves in the Eastern DPS will be managed by states and tribes. The Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources have developed plans to guide wolf management actions in the future. Issues such as control of problem animals, hunting and trapping, as well as long-term health of the wolf population, will be governed by the appropriate state or tribe.

The Service will continue to monitor gray wolf populations in the Eastern DPS for at least five years after delisting. The Service’s proposal to remove gray wolves in the Eastern DPS from the endangered and threatened species list is available for review.

Comments will be accepted for 120 days after the proposed rule is published. A series of public hearings will be held throughout the Eastern DPS. The Service will announce details of these hearings in the near future. Following the public comment period, the Service will evaluate all information and make a decision on whether to finalize the proposal. Until a final decision is made, wolves in the Eastern DPS remain threatened and protected under the Endangered Species Act.

Comments on the proposal to remove gray wolves in the Eastern DPS from the Federal list of endangered and threatened species may be submitted by e-mail to egwdelist@fs.fed.us; by sending a letter to Gray Wolf Delist – Eastern Distinct Population Segment, c/o Content Analysis Team, P.O. Box 221150, Salt Lake City, Utah 84122-1150; by sending a fax to (801)517-1015; or through the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. In the event that our internet connection is not functional, comments should be mailed or sent by fax.

For more information on the Service’s proposal, the status of wolves and wolf recovery in the Eastern United States, visit the Service’s website at <http://midwest.fws.gov>. In the event that our internet connection is not functional, contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Gray Wolf Review, 1 Federal Drive, Fort Snelling, MN 55111-4056 or call the Service’s Gray Wolf Information Line at 612-713-7337. This phone line is for information requests only; comments on the proposal made by phone will not be accepted.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the

Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.

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